

**Appropriations Committee
Health Subcommittee
February 24, 2022**

**Public Hearing on:
House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
(Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services)**

Good evening, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am Linda Parsons, a member of the Board of Directors for United Services, Inc.

United Services is the Local Mental Health Authority for 21 towns in Northeastern Connecticut. We are a nonprofit organization providing more than 30 programs to our community, including Outpatient Mental Health, Substance Abuse Treatment, Family Programs, and Crisis Services.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state budget.

I want to thank you for the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment for community nonprofits that you fought to include in last year's budget. I still worry about the future so I am here tonight to ask you to honor the long-term plan to address underfunding of community nonprofits and fund services by \$461 million over five years – or an additional 8% in Fiscal Year 2023.

Demand for United Services programs has never been higher. Our staff have now been working for 2 years with a community in crisis. The impacts of the pandemic on mental health cannot be overstated.

Compounding these stressors is the low salaries our underfunded state contracts have forced our agency to provide.

As an agency, we are currently operating at about a 25% vacancy rate, as is most if not all of the other nonprofit service providers. Low wages are the major cause.

Vacancies lead to high caseloads for our remaining staff, and increased stress at an already stressful job. It also leads to a longer wait for services for our clients.

Ex. I have a close relative who has been treated at United Services. She lives with anxiety and bipolar depression. At the start of her treatment, she had 3 different clinicians within two to three months due to their leaving for other jobs. It is quite difficult for someone to open up and develop a trusting, comfortable relationship with a clinician. It seemed that about the time things were going well her clinician left. Please keep in mind the effect the underfunding has on the clients as well as the clinicians.

The Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services does not provide support to existing services and programs that are struggling to keep up with the demand. We urge the Appropriations Committee to fight for funding for these programs by implementing the 8% funding increase.

Please help us help the adults struggling in our area.